

August 1, 2006 - Slaughter and McHugh Urge House Appropriators to Delay and Reform WHTI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, August 1, 2006

Slaughter and McHugh Urge House Appropriators to Delay and Reform WHTI

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-Fairport) and Rep. John M. McHugh (R-Pierrepont Manor) have sent a letter to Rep. Jerry Lewis and Rep. David Obey, Chairman and Ranking Member of the House Committee on Appropriations respectively, urging them to support changes to the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) in the 2007 Homeland Security spending bill. The letter was cosigned by 62 Members of Congress.

"This fight has always been about making border security work hand in hand with travel and trade," Rep. Slaughter said. "I'm confident we can fix WHTI where it is broken, so that we will achieve both greater security and economic prosperity."

"A protected border is fundamental to national security, but we simply must not allow such significant changes to be made at the expense of tourism, trade, and travel," Rep. McHugh said. "We can find a better way to accomplish this than through WHTI's extreme measures. Therefore, it is imperative that we delay implementation of this plan."

The Senate's 2007 Homeland Security appropriations bill includes a provision, authored by Senators Leahy and Stevens, that would extend the WHTI deadline for land borders from January 1, 2008 to June 1, 2009. In addition, the provision sets limits on the cost of the PASS card (an alternative identity document to a passport), requires DHS to share PASS

card technology with Canada and Mexico, and install PASS card readers at all land ports of entry.

Finally, it establishes alternative procedures for groups of children traveling across the border with parental consent. The House Homeland Security spending bill did not include the WHTI provision. The House and Senate must now meet and agree to a final bill before sending it to the President for signature.

"Should DHS and State implement WHTI as-planned, cross-border commerce will dry-up and significantly damage border communities, international trade, and the travel industry," the letter reads. "It is clear that Congress must step-in and provide DHS and State the direction for getting WHTI done right before it is too late."

The Leahy/Stevens provision echoes legislation that Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh introduced in June to reform and improve WHTI.

In May, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), at the request of Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh, issued a report highly critical of the Departments of Homeland Security and State's vision for WHTI. GAO suggests that DHS and State are unlikely to meet the 2008 deadline and have not demonstrated that WHTI will improve border security.

The complete text of Rep. Slaughter and Rep. McHugh's letter, including a list of co-sponsors, can be found below:

July 27, 2006

The Honorable Jerry Lewis

The Honorable David Obey

Chairman

Ranking Member

House Committee on Appropriations

House Committee on Appropriations

H-218

1016 Longworth

Washington, DC 20515

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lewis and Ranking Member Obey,

As you begin Conference deliberations on H.R. 5441, the Fiscal Year 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill, we urge your support for the Leahy/Stevens provision included in the Senate-passed bill. The provision makes much-needed changes to implementation of the Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI) by providing DHS and State an extended deadline, as well as setting parameters for alternative documents.

As you are aware, the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004 requires the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and State to implement a plan, called WHTI, to require travelers re-entering the U.S. from Canada,

Mexico, or the Caribbean to present documents denoting both identity and citizenship by January 1, 2008. We believe the Intelligence Reform bill gives DHS and State discretion to develop low-cost and easily obtainable documents for U.S. travelers. Unfortunately, DHS and State have proposed that all travelers carry a \$97 passport or a loosely defined \$55 travel card, commonly referred to as the PASS card. These documents are prohibitively expensive and difficult to obtain for many American families, and do nothing to encourage travel into the U.S. Should DHS and State implement WHTI as-planned, cross-border commerce will dry-up and significantly damage border communities, international trade, and the travel industry.

In addition to the serious problems with the proposed documents, DHS and State are far behind in implementing WHTI by the January 1, 2008 deadline. The agencies have not determined the type of technology to include in the PASS card or requested funding in the FY 2007 budget to install new card-readers at land and sea ports-of-entry. Such inaction has led the Government Accountability Office to state that DHS and State will likely miss the 2008 implementation date.

It is clear that Congress must step-in and provide DHS and State the direction for getting WHTI done right before it is too late. The Senate's FY 2007 Homeland Security Appropriations bill contains language that would extend the WHTI deadline and give DHS and State clear instructions for implementing the PASS card system. Specifically, the Leahy/Stevens provision establishes a uniform implementation date of June 1, 2009 for sea and land travel; sets limits on the cost of the PASS card; requires DHS to share the PASS card technology with Canada and Mexico and install PASS card readers at all land ports of entry; and establishes alternative procedures for groups of children traveling across the border with parental consent.

The Leahy/Stevens provision is a necessary first-step toward ensuring that WHTI strengthens border security without unintentionally closing our borders to legitimate trade and travel. Accordingly, we strongly urge you to make certain that the Senate's WHTI language is retained in the final conference report for the FY 2007 Homeland Security appropriations bill. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Louise Slaughter

John McHugh

Bernard Sanders

Lloyd Doggett

Henry Brown

Sheila Jackson Lee

Robert Brady

Charles Bass

Thaddeus McCotter

Jeb Bradley

Michael McNulty

Mark Kennedy

David Reichert

Collin Peterson

Sherrod Brown

Silvestre Reyes

John Dingell

Earl Pomeroy

Sherwood Boehlert

Raul Grijalva

Charles Rangel

Bob Filner

John Sweeney

Neil Abercrombie

Norm Dicks

Tom Reynolds

Candice Miller

Michael Doyle

Ron Paul

Rick Larsen

Steven LaTourette

John "Joe" Schwarz

Janice Schakowsky

Solomon Ortiz

Charlie Gonzalez

Bart Stupak

Sam Farr

Corrine Brown

Susan Davis

Michael Michaud

Adam Smith

Carolyn Maloney

Donald Manzullo

James Oberstar

Lincoln Diaz-Balart

Barbara Lee

Tom Allen

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen

Tom Feeney

Jim McDermott

Ric Keller

Brian Baird

Jim McGovern

Luis Fortuno

William Jefferson

Phil English

Fred Upton

Jay Inslee

James Walsh

Rush Holt

Diane Watson

Rob Simmons

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